There are often girls who say this kind of thing, but they're just putting on a show of being sweet and innocent. That's what I think.

I didn't notice at all~

He liked me...?

If you say something like this, you might have a bad personality.

Any little thing can reveal that feeling of love.

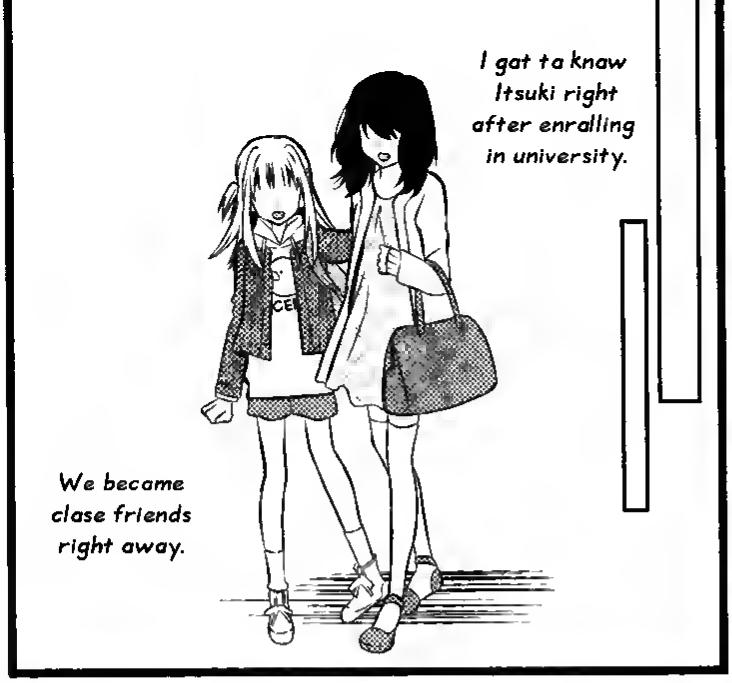
Actions, words, a glance.

when that kind of affection is coming from my female friend, I wonder what's the best thing to do.
However,

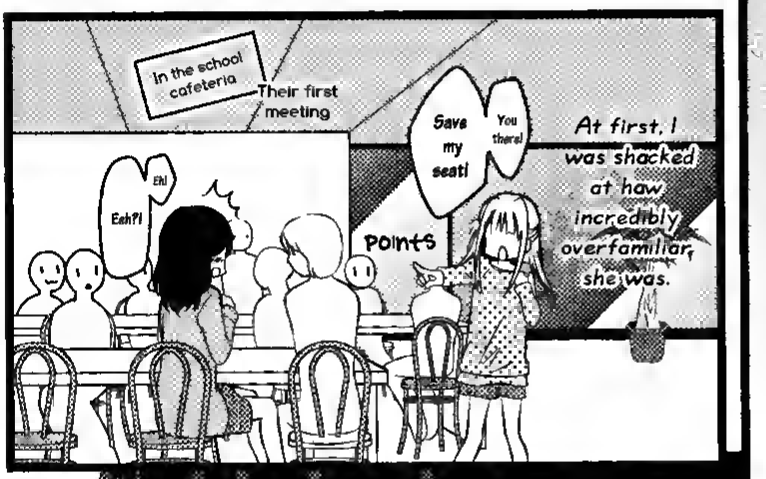
MORATORIUM:
FIRST PART

Hey,
is it okay if I stay over at your place?
Queen Angel
C'mon, your place is so much closer to school.
Plus, my interview suit is still there.
It's fine, but like, shouldn't you return home every once in a while?
You two really are close, aren't you?

But I do! I've got plenty of other friends.
Actually, I don't have many, but still...
squeeze
This one doesn't have any other friends, you know.
So what else can I do?
Right?
.....
Even if you say that's the reason, it's really because you love me, right?
clench



She said thot pretty smoothly.



But I'm sure she's still shaking.

Far sameane like me, bad at socializing, with na friends warthy af the name.

I was averjayed at finally having sameane I cauld call my best friend.

The first time I thought something was off was in autumn af aur first yeor.
I lived with my parents, and I got in the habit of hanging out at Itsuki's apartment, where she lives on her own.
Itsuki~
Sorry, I forgot my bath towel.
RATTLE
!?

Ehh?
Wait- What are you doing!? Don't come out completely naked!
You pervert!
HOP
What's the problem? We're both girls.
Look!,These huge breasts are my pride~
SLAM!
Even if we're both girls, there are some parts you're supposed to cover up!!
Come on, go back inside!
Shove
Shove

Thinking back now, I was pretty stupid.
Although, in those days, I was so afraid of losing my first friend that I would agonize over the smallest things.
glance
Huh? Did Ituski seriously recoil from me...?
I wonder if she thought I was gross.
ROCK
If you don't dry your hair, you'll catch a cold.
Hey, Mao!
What are you doing?

rub rub
Wh-
What?
snort snort snort
chuckle
.....

Y'know,
once in a while, you're so defenseless it startles me.
Why's that?
I'm concerned that you'll walk out naked like that in front of whoever.
No way! Doing that is—!!
For one thing, I don't want any man except my boyfriend seeing me naked.
Well, I don't have one right now, but—
Despite having no friends, you've dated men, and done more...
The epitome of the kind of woman that women hate~
squeeze
Hya!?
MESSY
Heey~

By definition, a boyfriend is someone who's attracted to me.

Because of that, he'll tolerate even my selfishness and thoughtlessness, for little while at least.

And when I get dumped, I start dating the next one.

It's a relationship on equal terms.

Once she realizes that I'm worthless, won't she abandon me?

However, friendship is different.

Someday,
won't Itsuki's affection for me reach an end?

Itsuki?
...Huh?
What's this feeling?
No way
Is she moving in for a kiss?
Pat

There.
All done.
From now on, just use the hair dryer, okay?
Y-... yeah.
That was a shock.
glance

Huh? Is this how it feels to have a friend?

Is it normal for the mood to get like this?

It's been three yeors since then

At times, I thought, "Moybe this meons she likes me?"

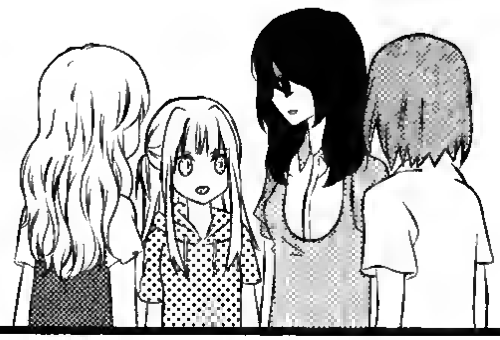
At others, "Am I just moking ossumptions after oll?" I've been stuck on this loop.

It's my first time, so I just don't get it...

Through Itsuki, I've even became friends with other girls. However,

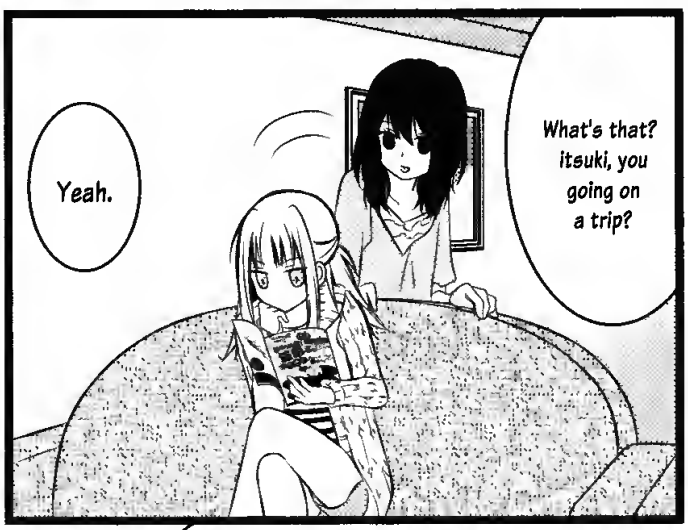
os for feeling that delicate sensation, it hos only hoppened with Itsuki.

And now,

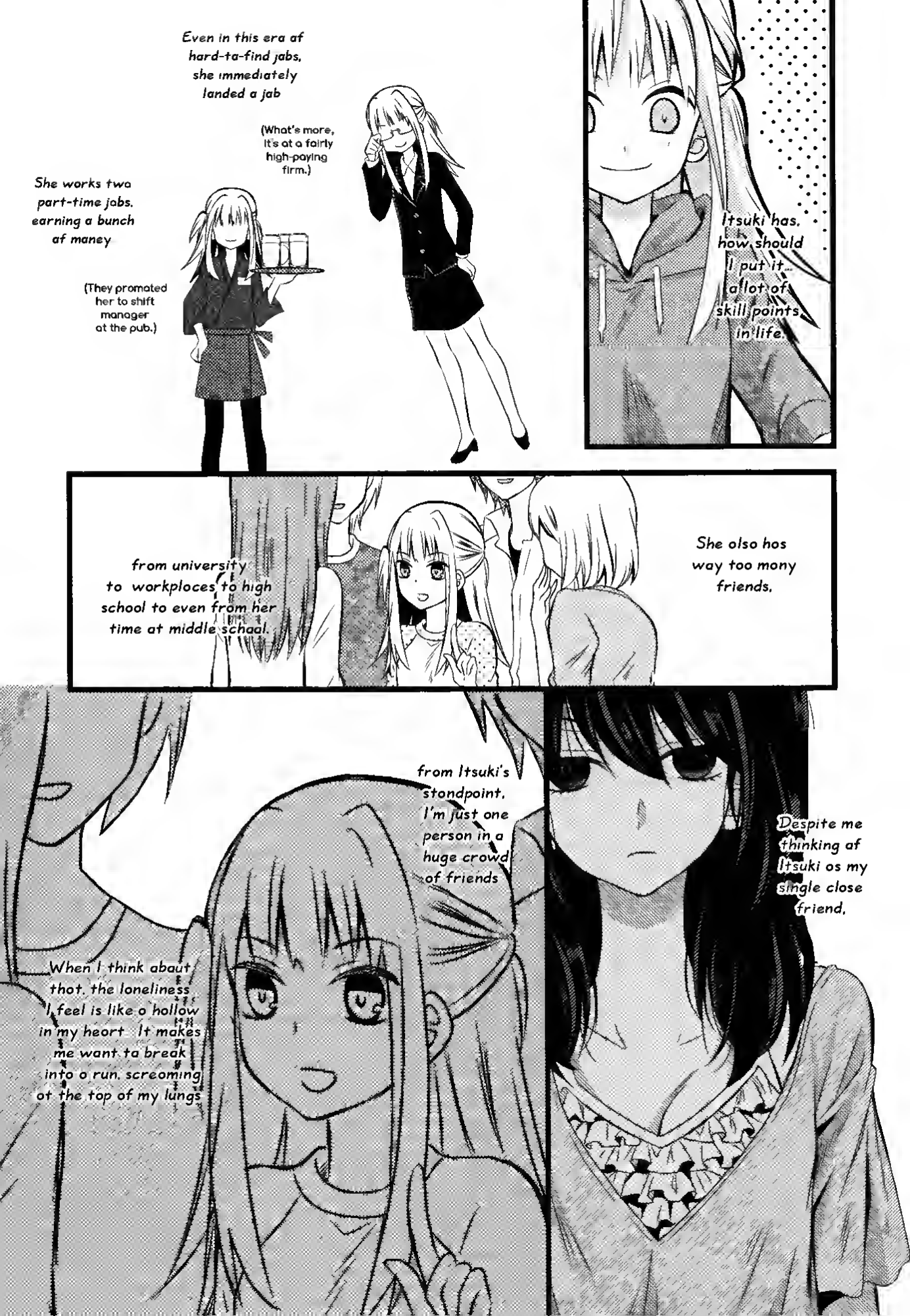


because of this attraction.
Itsuki is still the only person I'm afraid of losing.

Who said you were coming?
Going overseas would be great, like Hawaii!


Yeah.
What's that? Itsuki, you going on a trip?

Ugh...
What're you talking about? You haven't even finished your job search.
I wanna go, tooo. A graduation trip! We'll go on a graduation trip!
GLOOM
Eeh~?
it's a trip with my friends from work.


Even in this era of hard-to-find jobs, she immediately landed a job
(What's more, it's at a fairly high-paying firm.)
She works two part-time jobs, earning a bunch of money
(They promoted her to shift manager at the pub.)
Itsuki has, how should I put it... a lot of skill points in life.
She also has way too many friends,
from university to workplaces to high school to even from her time at middle school.
from Itsuki's standpoint, I'm just one person in a huge crowd of friends
When I think about that, the loneliness I feel is like a hollow in my heart. It makes me want to break into a run, screaming at the top of my lungs
Despite me thinking of Itsuki as my single close friend,

...It's hopeless by now. I don't even know how many companies have rejected me.
Someone like me will never find a job in my entire life~
You're giving up already?
For a change of pace, you want to come along? On the trip?
I'm going with people from work, but some of them are bringing other friends or their boyfriends, so...
.....
knock
It's fine.
I've always wanted to go on a trip with just the two of us.

If I ask her like this,
.....
then the tension will give her a vague feeling that we're eloping
squeeze
I want to know for sure.
Ring Ring

I want to capture these vague glimpses of her feelings that emerge and vanish like flickering lights.

*Hakone is a popular resort town around two hours southwest of Tokyo by train
Let me see... "*Hakone and Sunshine."
Yeah. I was looking at the brochure just now.
Ah, Yoshika?
jump
Hello?
Ahaha
Okay!
Yeah. Completely!
That girl is just too dumb!
Hakone is the top contender, right?
Yeah.
Roger.
Got it. I'll let every one know on *Line.
*Line is a popular messaging software

.....
Okay, I'll contact you again.
Later.
Pat
Mao,
work hard to find a job quickly.

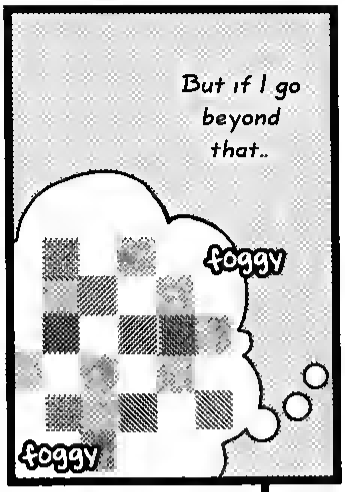
And then, the two of us will go on a graduation trip.
.....
Okay...
That's right. I'll give you a book that helped me out while I was looking.
Now, where'd I put it...
Because I was interrupted by the phone, Itsuki ended up going back to normal.
Disappointing...

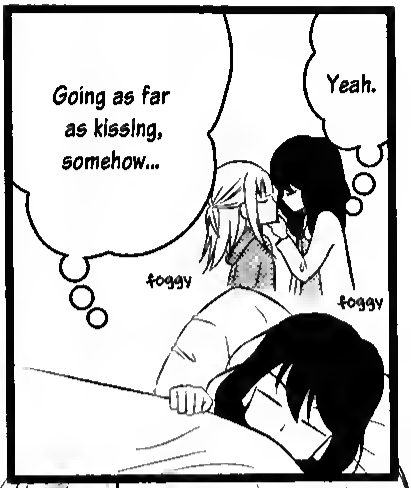
It won't be easy to draw her out.
Huh?
You... you've finally awoken to the other side?
Don't mess around! I'm serious about this~
Doesn't have any friends she could ask for advice
Like I said—
There's this girl that seems to like me, but I don't know how I can get her to come confess to me. I need advice.
You decided to call up an old ex to talk about what?

Come on, if I do that, there's no point!
If that's the case, just go ahead and confess yourself.
The situation is that you want her to confess, so I assume you like this girl back, right?
?
Why?
I need her to say it to me.
As long as you end up dating, then it doesn't matter who says it.
Huh? Dating?
Is that what's going to happen?
!

But for me, there's no way I could see a guy friend romantically.
Well, as far as two women dating goes, since it's pure, it's still fine.
Is a relationship with Itsuki what I want?
Dating, and even fucking!
Blegh! Definitely impossible.
What about me?
Maybe it isn't impossible for me?
That night, I went back to my own home for the first time in a while and tried my very hardest to imagine it.

JUMPS
It just makes me uncom-fortable!!
It's useless!!


But if I go beyond that..
foggy
foggy


Going as far as kissing, somehow...
Yeah.
foggy
foggy

When I reach the point of imagining things like touching her vagina or being touched by her...
Honestly, I even feel disgusted.

I'm incapable of feeling sexual desire for Itsuki.

Like this, even though I like Itsuki.
for some reason, I guess it's impossible.
It's a bit of a shock.
chatter
chatter

Last night was the first time in a while that you didn't stay over, so I slept really well.
Morning.
Good morning, Itsuki.
That so?
Well then, I guess I'll keep you awake once again.

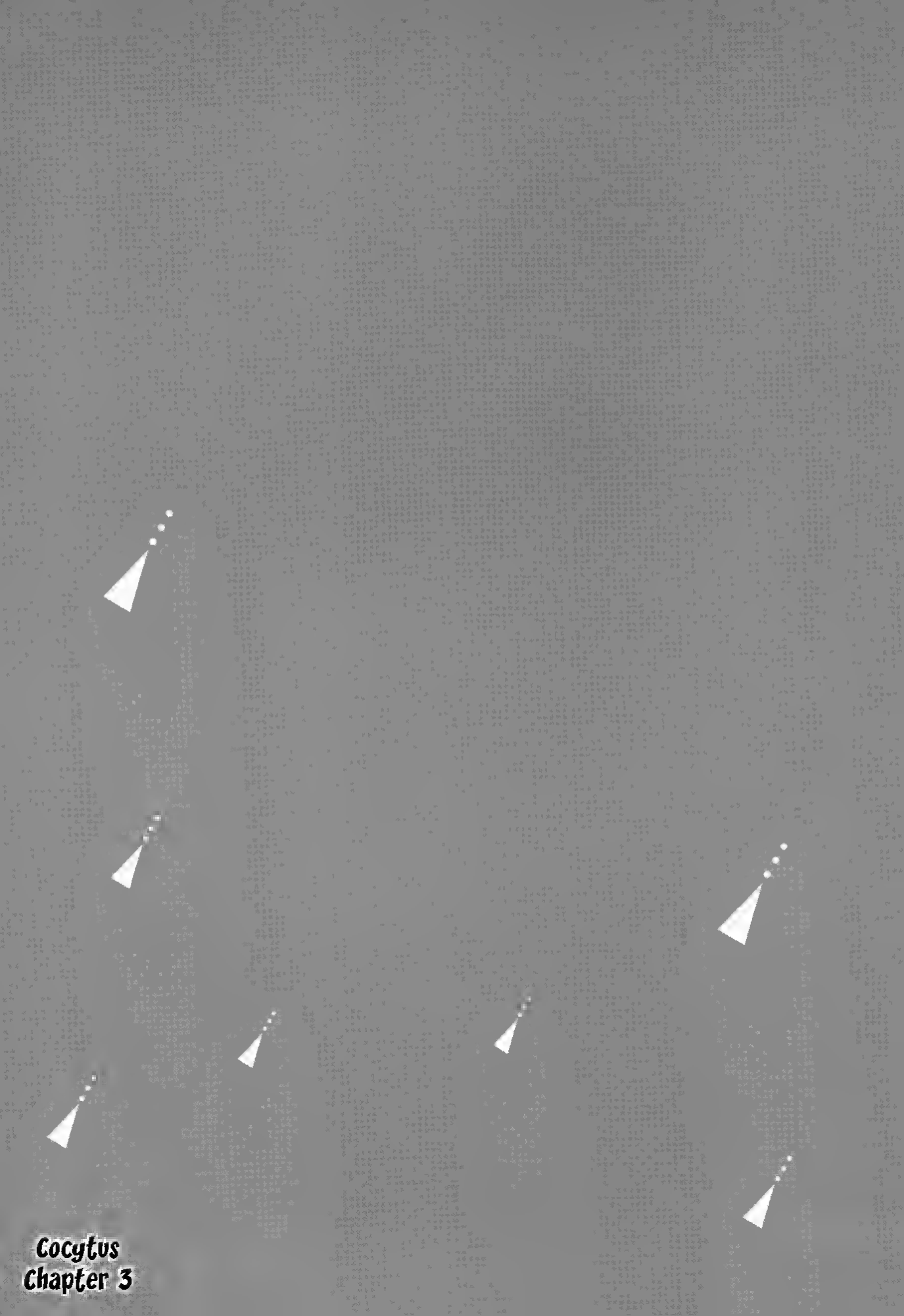
Can I go spend the night at your place again?
I don't have any romantic feelings towards Itsuki.
I understand what I learned yesterday.

Becouse we're friends, because we're both women.
Even if she tells me she loves me, there is nothing I can do.

Never-theless,

Even so, I'm like a middle school girl trying to monopolize her friend.
It seems that I wont Itsuki to love me only for the sake of fulfilling that desire.

I need to know for sure, whatever it takes.
Like I thought, looks like I've got a bad personolity.


Cocytus
Chapter 3

[COCYTUS]
KODAMA NAOKO

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COCYTUS CHAPTER 3
MORATORIUM: FIRST PART
KODAMA NAOKO